

When the United States took over the major military effort in 1965 Moss argues that the central flaw in the U.S. approach was the failure to translate U.S. political objectives in South Vietnam into a viable military strategy. General William Westmoreland's choice of the attrition strategy never asked the critically important question of how many of the enemy soldiers had to be killed in order to win? Relying on the self-induced myths of fire power and technology, Westmoreland committed the nation to a war in which "a U.S. military victory was probably never a realistic strategic possibility." It never seemed to occur to U.S. political and military leaders that the North's ability to absorb pain was greater than the U.S.'s ability to inflict pain.

On the home front Moss concludes that the "stab-in-the-back thesis"--that the U.S. lost in Vietnam because of the media (especially television) or the radical left student movement--is wholly unwarranted. In the first case he points out that it did not take television to turn the American people against the war in Korea in 1951-1953, and that even if the media had told the story the U.S. Army wanted told in Vietnam the results would have been no different. The radical left was less instrumental in turning the nation against the war, Moss argues, than the "wide spread opposition of . . . mostly patriotic, law-abiding, and God-fearing mainstream Americans" who came to loathe the war that could not be won.

Moss does not mythicize the enemy in Vietnam. He recognizes that while "the insurgency was a genuine revolt based in the South . . . it was organized and directed from the North." He also points out the many strategic errors made by the North Vietnamese such as the early decision to pursue conventional warfare in the spring 1972 offensive.

Moss also separates the warrior from the war. American soldiers fought with courage and dedication, he argues, and should not be blamed for errors in judgment and policy of their political and military leaders.

In all, Moss's work is recommended for advanced students--high school or college. It is thought-provoking, comprehensive, and well written.

Jeffrey Kimball's *To Reason Why* treats a more narrow aspect of America's involvement in Vietnam: a variety of views on why the U.S. became involved in Vietnam 1945 to 1975. Divided into seven sections that consist of excerpts from primary sources and secondary accounts and analysis, the book would be useful to students who wish to focus on this important aspect of U.S. policy. It would not suffice, however, for a book of readings to supplement either Herring's *America's Longest War* or Moss's *Vietnam: An American Ordeal*. Teachers looking for a companion to either of these fine histories would more likely turn to Moss's *A Vietnam Reader: Sources and Essays* (1991).

SUNY College at Cortland

Frank A. Burdick

Robin Frame. *The Political Development of the British Isles, 1100-1400.* Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1990. Pp. viii, 256. Cloth, \$39.95; paper, \$12.95.

Frame (University of Durham), an expert on medieval Irish history, attempts to reorient readers' views of later medieval political development in the British Isles. His deceptively simple thesis, that the British Isles have formed a natural unit, not only in terms of geography but also in terms of political organization, provides a powerful challenge to the usual examination of the period and the topic. Frame provides a detailed examination of Wales, Ireland, and Scotland, with rich bibliographic sources, with the view of laying the groundwork for studying them as legitimate but regional centers of political power. The author warns that the book is "idiosyncratic" and "experimental," and the thread that holds the fabric together is the expansion of political power, the responses it encountered, and the limits placed upon his organizing themes. The main themes are: (1) the impact on the British isles of the dominant power within them, represented by the Anglo-Norman aristocracy, church, and monarch; and, (2) the successor of the above, the English state. It should be noted that despite the intentions of the author and his different orientation, this book is often rather deterministic as if what happened was probably for the best. Thus, while the book provides, especially for American readers,

a different perspective and a rich, original source of material for students and teachers, the overall thesis is finally not persuasive. His work might prove interesting to American students who are used to examining history from regional perspectives. Frame notes that this examination was stimulated by recent regional nationalism and the U.K.'s closer current and future ties with Europe. The maps and dynastic charts are adequate, but most students would benefit from access to a good atlas. This is an original, learned approach that is probably a bit rich for general classroom use.

Whitman College

Donald P. King

Henry Kamen. *Spain, 1469-1714: A Society of Conflict*. London and New York: Longman, 1991. Second edition. Pp. xv, 307. paper, \$16.95.

The difficulty in teaching renaissance and early modern Spanish history is not so much the long rise of Iberia to its time of greatness covered by Professor Kamen's work, and certainly not the *post mortem* of its social and institutional collapse from the early eighteenth until the late twentieth century, but in intelligently analyzing the period in between. All major societies have these richly detailed moments, and they sometimes recur after lulls of exhaustion. Spain, unfortunately, thus far has only this 200-year period of true national greatness: world discovery, empire, the *Siglo de Oro*, and great power status all in one. Everything about Spain accelerates during this period, and woe to the disorganized teacher who fails to make the most of the Spanish sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Most of the best works of Iberian historiography naturally focus on this magnificent (and sometimes awful) moment of Spanish history: Elliott, Lynch, Domínguez Ortiz, Fernández Álvarez, Carandé, and Maravall, to name only a few. It is not an easy period about which to write, but the task is made easier since many of the earlier English-language histories are out-of-date and do not include the impressive work done of late by historians in Spain itself, now once more in possession of an unfettered historical profession with a modern mentality and methodology.

Kamen's five chapters divide the period into three royal administrations (the Catholic Kings, Charles V, and Philip II), leaving an almost equally long time in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries to be summarized more abruptly in a crisis chapter and a recovery chapter. Throughout the 276 pages of his book, there is little space for in-depth analyses of the various *reyes*, which is not Kamen's specialty in any case. Economic history and administrative development in relation to social history has been his format in other works, and he uses it here to marshal a great deal of difficult material behind his chronicle of the sudden emergence of Spain as a dynamic society. One of his most useful ideas is to compile the special administrative and fiscal vocabulary of the times, which can be maddening to do in lecture. Had he paid equal attention to the development of the laws and special legalistic Spanish mind of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, he would have dispatched another topic difficult to lecture on without mystifying class members.

As a possible textbook for a course on early modern Spain, however, Kamen's work offers the attractive strategy of allowing the lecturer to concentrate upon the character of the Spanish monarchy and aristocracy, and to develop such topics as the character of the *conquistadores*, the enormous intellectual growth that Spanish society enjoyed during this period, or to broaden the scope of coverage of the hopelessly complicated foreign relations during the period.

Kamen's brevity makes a complicated period understandable to the student and provides the lecturer with a choice of spectacular topics upon which to concentrate. It may be the best short book on the period in English.

University of New Mexico

Robert Kern